

## Cooperative Extension



## Family Mealtimes – Making It a Priority

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**F**amily mealtimes were once a standard part of our society but seem to have drifted away. Studies show that enjoying more meals as a family, offer numerous benefits. Research indicates families attain better communication and build stronger relationships with regular family meals. Children achieve better grades in school and are better adjusted as teens. Family meals benefit the entire family as they enjoy better nutrition.

### The reasons that families don't eat dinner together are familiar:

- Frequently conflicting schedules prevent family meals
- Often families report that they don't have time to cook
- Some parents profess that they don't know how to cook
- Many families have the television on during dinner and many actually eat in front of the television



Sometimes a very simple activity can have important, long-lasting benefits. According to parenting and health experts, this is exactly the case with family mealtimes. Eating and talking together can help children be happier, healthier, and more successful in school. Family mealtimes can also help make parenting easier!

### Family mealtimes foster family togetherness.

**EATING TOGETHER** is one important way to build a sense of family unity. Developing a sense of family identity and togetherness helps children feel safe and secure in a world that can be confusing. Mealtime conversations – both the talking and the listening – are more important than the location where you actually eat together or the specific foods that are served.

### Family mealtimes help prevent behavior problems.

**IF YOU WANT TO KEEP YOUR CHILD FROM GETTING INTO TROUBLE**, family mealtimes are a great place to start. The more often that families eat together the less likely teenagers are to become depressed, use illegal drugs, abuse alcohol, smoke cigarettes, develop eating disorders, or get pregnant. A simple family habit leads to impressive benefits for kids.

### Family mealtimes help children do well in school.

**MEALTIME CONVERSATIONS** also translate into success at school. As children listen to adults talk, they learn important language skills, such as new vocabulary and putting words into sentences. These skills, which are necessary for understanding what is read and for expressing oneself verbally, help children do better in the classroom and on tests.

### Family mealtimes help improve children's nutrition.

**WHAT YOU PUT ON THE TABLE** is also important. When families make mealtimes more of a priority, they naturally tend to pay more attention to

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# Summertime – A Good Time to Focus on Improving Our Health

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With summer only a few months away, we have the opportunity to improve our lives and health. Weight loss is often the most common goal before the summer. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2008 that thirty states in the U.S. have a prevalence of overweight citizens with New Jersey's obesity rate at 23.5%. One quarter of New Jersey's residents need to change their eating/activity behaviors to prevent the onset of chronic diseases. Eating healthy and losing as little as 5-10% of total body weight can have tremendous health benefits and decrease the risk of chronic disease.



The USDA recommends eating fewer calories and increasing physical activity for gradual and steady weight loss of 1 to 2 pounds a week over a period of time. People who have adopted a healthy eating plan

that includes long-term changes in diet and exercise were more successful at keeping the weight off. When thinking about losing weight or eating healthier, where should you begin?

## VISIONS

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## Six steps to getting started towards healthier eating:

**Make a commitment** – write a contract for yourself and have a friend or spouse sign it to support your efforts. Your contract should include: projected weight loss or dietary changes, increased activity you are willing to engage in; the date you start, the date you would like to achieve your goal; and your reasons for the lifestyle change.

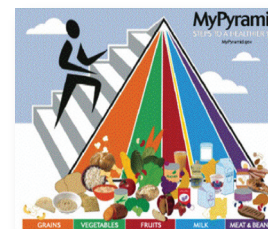
**Note your starting point** – write down your weight and height, and clothing size in your contract. Experts recommend that you speak to a healthcare provider and discuss your plan for weight loss and evaluate any health risks. Start keeping a food diary as it will help make you more aware of what you're eating, portion size and the time of day you are eating.

**Set Goals** – by starting with one long-term goal and two or three short term goals. Each goal should be realistic, specific and achievable. For example, if your long term goal is to lose 30 pounds in one year; the short term goals may be to eat smaller portions at meals and walk for 30 minutes a day / 5 times a week and eat breakfast every day within 60 to 90 minutes of waking up. Be sure to make allowances for occasional setbacks such as celebrations and holidays.

**Support system** – will help you if it includes people and resources you can rely on to make lifestyle changes. Ask family and friends to join you in your weight loss efforts by exercising with you, encouraging you to eat a healthier diet and sharing healthy recipes. Hopefully, your friends and family will adopt a healthier lifestyle too.

**Monitor your progress** – on a weekly basis and evaluate your achievements and reassess your goals. For example, if eating five fruits and vegetables a day is one of your goals and it becomes difficult to achieve, consider trying recipes that incorporate more in salads, sandwiches or casseroles. Remember you need 2 cups of fruit or fruit juice and 2-1/2 cups of vegetables each day.

**Identify tools for success** – which can give you more information and answer questions on your eating plan. Use [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)



With spring in the air, you have the opportunity to start a new lifestyle plan. Remember, healthy eating and daily activity provides the solid foundation to a personal health plan that paves the road to success.

# Ways to Increase Your Physical Activity While on the Job

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Over 60% of American adults do not engage in enough physical activity as reported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. According to the American Heart Association many of us have sedentary jobs and work takes up a significant part of our day. Very often our jobs keep us stationed at a desk or in front of a computer for long periods of time both at work and at home. Our overall workload is demanding and overwhelming commitments leave little time for regular exercise routines. Is there a way to improve our health by increasing our level of physical activity while on the job?

When working in front of a computer for long periods of time it is important to take short fitness breaks whenever possible. A 3-5 minute break taken every hour can help you maintain attentiveness to your work. Use a pedometer to calculate the number of steps you take in a normal day then set a goal of increasing your number of steps gradually. A goal of 10,000 steps per day will provide an opportunity to maintain a healthy lifestyle.



Walking a total of 30 minutes each day at work, dividing the time between breaks and lunch can go a long way to improving your health. During good weather days park your car a little further from the entrance to the building or get off the bus a block early and walk the remaining distance to the office. Seek out a coworker who is interested in taking a walk for a few minutes before or after lunch. Map out a few trails in the building that you can take for a change of pace. When you can, take the stairs instead of using the elevator to burn five times more calories. If time allows walk a message to a colleague rather than sending it through email or the telephone.

Fitness breaks at work can be as simple as walking up and down the stairs a few times or walking in place in front of your desk. Sitting and standing in front of your chair a few times in three minutes will help increase your circulation and stretch your muscles. Once in a while take a minute to stretch your arms overhead then allowing your arms to dangle at your sides. Stand for a few minutes to change your position while talking on the telephone. The movement and different position will leave you feeling refreshed and energized.

There are a few ways to energize yourself at work if your day consists of sitting at a desk for extended periods of time. Brief periods of exercise throughout the day will help

you burn calories, increase your circulation, increase your oxygen, increase your stamina, and improve your concentration. Always check with your physician before beginning any new exercise routine. Create your own personal workplace wellness plan and mini fitness routine to take small steps at work to improve your physical and emotional health!

For additional information:  
[www.getamovinggetthehealthynj.rutgers.edu](http://www.getamovinggetthehealthynj.rutgers.edu)  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)  
[www.americaonthemove](http://www.americaonthemove)  
[www.smallstep.gov](http://www.smallstep.gov)



## Are You REALLY at Risk for a Health Problem?

Andrew Pleasant, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Human Ecology

One of the more common ways people deal with statistics is when hearing about their chance of getting a disease. Unfortunately, many people are prone to misunderstanding such statistics.

### INDIVIDUAL VERSUS POPULATION RISK

For example, the lifetime breast cancer rate for women in the United States is 12.7 per cent. This statistic is often reported as, "one in eight women will get breast cancer". But many people will not understand their actual risk from these numbers. For example, over 80 per cent of American women mistakenly believe that one in eight women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year.

The statistic 'one in eight' makes a strong headline but can dramatically misrepresent individual breast cancer risk.

Throughout her life, a woman's actual risk of breast cancer varies for many reasons, and is rarely ever actually one in eight. For instance, in the United States 0.43 per cent of women aged 30–39 (1 in 233) are diagnosed with breast cancer. In women aged 60–69, the rate is 3.65 per cent (1 in 27).

A general population estimate of risk, like one in eight, does not accurately describe every individual. Many factors can create differences in individual risk. These might include age, diet, literacy level, location, education level, income, race and ethnicity, and a host of other genetic and lifestyle factors.

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# Children of All Ages Need to Move More

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The Institute of Medicine says that over the past 30 years, the number of overweight preschool children, ages 2-5, has more than doubled, and for children ages 6-11, that number has tripled. These figures are troubling. There are many reasons for children being overweight, but one big reason is "what they are doing."

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the average child is watching about 3 hours of television a day. The average child spends 5-1/2 hours on all screen media combined (TV, DVDs, computer time outside of schoolwork, and video games).

Children spend more time sitting than moving. Regular physical activity is important for overall health and well-being. The National Association for Sports and Physical Education recommends that every day, toddlers, and preschoolers should have structured or planned physical activity - at least 30 minutes for toddlers; and at least 60 minutes for preschool to school age children. It doesn't have to be continuous. Children should be active in blocks of 15 minutes, as long as it adds up to 30 minutes or 60 minutes. Except when they are sleeping, no more than one hour should pass, without them being active.

Physical activity is any body movement that uses energy, like running, jumping, pushing a stroller, or dancing. Young children usually want to be active. They always seem to be in motion. They run, hop, kick, throw, climb, and crawl, but they have to have the chance to do this. Many children don't get enough physical activity because they don't get the chance to do these things. Too many children do not get enough time to be physically active in childcare settings or at home. They need to move more. Children of all ages need daily physical activity.

Limiting the amount of time children spend in sedentary activities, like watching TV or playing video games, is one of the best ways to get them to be more active. Parents need to establish guidelines and put limits into practice. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children under the age of 2 years watch no TV at all and that screen time should be limited to no more than 1-2 hours of quality programming a day for children 2 years and older. Adults need to lead by example. Check the amount of time you spend sitting and check the time you spend moving. If you need to make a change, do it in small steps.

## Here are some fun family physical activities to try:

- Play *Follow the Leader*. Walk like a duck, jump like a frog, and gallop like a horse!
- Play Freeze Tag or Freeze Dance.
- At TV commercials, use the time for an activity break, like 10 toe touches, 10 stretching arms to the sky, marching in place, or play "Simon Says."
- Ride bikes as a family. Remember to wear safety helmets!
- Make it a habit to share a good hearty laugh with your child. It's fun and it's healthy too!
- Be a doer, not a watcher!
- Visit <http://www.getmovinggetthehealthynj.rutgers.edu> for more ideas!



## Are You REALLY at Risk for a Health Problem? *continued from page 3*

When you encounter an estimate of risk, your very first question should be, does that explain my personal risk? Take the time to fully educate yourself about your personal risk. Your lifestyle and genetic history may put you at a higher or lower risk than the average for the entire population.

### ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE RISK

There is also a difference between absolute and relative risk. Absolute risk is simply the probability of something happening (for instance, the one in eight figure used above). Relative risk is the comparison between risks in two different situations.

For example, imagine reading an article that reports on a new vaccine. The article reports that researchers gave one group of 1000 people a new vaccine and another similar group got a placebo. After five years, one vaccinated person is diagnosed, compared to four people who received the placebo.

The absolute risk of getting the disease is 0.1 per cent for people who got the vaccine, and it is 0.4 per cent for people who got the placebo. Headlines could accurately read, "New vaccine lowers risk by 0.3 per cent." Not much of a headline!

Relative risk presents a very different picture. The new vaccine cuts the relative risk as compared to the placebo by 75 per cent. Thus, headlines could also accurately read "New vaccine lowers risk by 75 per cent", which will grab many people's attention.

Knowing the difference between absolute or relative risk makes you a more health literate person. You will be better prepared to understand the many claims about health that we encounter everyday.

# Health is Wealth

Barbara O'Neill, Ph.D., CFP®, Extension Specialist in Financial Resource Management

## "Your health may determine your wealth."

These words are a subheading in *Who's Afraid to Be a Millionaire?*, a book by financial journalist Kelvin Boston. Boston, host of the national PBS series *Money Wise*, wrote about relationships between emotional attitudes, physical health, and financial success.

Physical capital is a person's ability to earn a living and make investments. Healthy people often have long life expectancies, which gives their investments time to grow. "Longevity nurtures prosperity," explains Boston, who notes that good health gives you more time for compound interest to build wealth. Conversely, those in poor health often experience the wealth-draining effects of disability, sickness, and death.

One factor, in particular, can erode physical capital: the economic impact of preventable or treatable illness. Examples include hypertension, diabetes, and overweight and obesity. Boston states "good health is the best investment you can make and that "too many people imperil their physical capital by refusing to incorporate healthier changes into their daily lives." He urges readers to protect their physical capital by safeguarding their health and balancing work and play. It is a mistake to get so busy earning money that health maintenance is ignored.

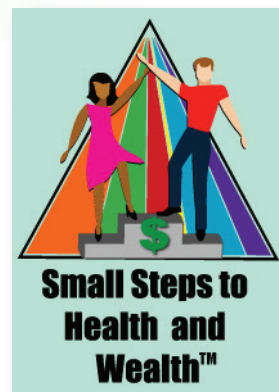
Time is a crucial component in wealth accumulation. People who are healthy generally live longer than those with health "issues." Boston notes that "having a shorter life span means that less healthy people have less time to earn money, provide for their families, and increase their net worth." People with longer life expectancies, on the other hand, have more years of compound interest on their side.

Health and wealth are linked in many ways as explained in Rutgers Cooperative Extension's *Small Steps to Health and Wealth™* Web site (see <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/sshw/>). Choose a healthy lifestyle and you will improve your odds of becoming a millionaire according to the book *Getting Rich in America: 8 Simple Rules*. What to do? Boston advises the following: get regular checkups, quit smoking, lose weight, exercise regularly, and reduce dietary fat and cholesterol.

There's no better example of the wealth-building effects of a long and healthy life than the story of a retired Franklin, NJ teacher who gave nearly \$1 million to local organizations and charities in her will in 1991. Her story was noteworthy, not just because of her generosity, but because she was able to accumulate an estate of more than \$3 million on a relatively modest salary. She was literally "the millionairess next door."

In retrospect, the story was not as unbelievable as it first seemed. First, she was, by all accounts, an astute investor who bought and held quality stocks. She also saved for retirement in a tax-deferred 403(b) plan. Finally, she died at age 91 and had seven decades of compound interest as an investor. Had she lived until only 65 or 70, a shorter life span would have substantially reduced her fortune and charitable bequests.

Want to become a millionaire? Take good care of yourself. Eat right, exercise regularly, and get regular check-ups and screening exams. Couple this with regular investment deposits, tax advantaged retirement savings accounts, and compound interest and you'll be well on your way.



# Is a Food Poisoning Outbreak Brewing in Your Kitchen?

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Recent food recalls and food poisoning outbreaks have made food safety a top concern for many consumers. Most Americans believe that food processing plants and restaurants are the most likely locations for food safety problems to occur, with private homes being the least likely place. In reality, food mishandling in home kitchens is the culprit in many food poisoning cases. To find out how to protect your family, review the checklist below and mark the safe food handling practices and habits you already perform. Then, review the items you did not check to identify the changes that will get your whole kitchen in top food safety shape.



## KITCHEN FACILITIES

### 1) Countertops and Cutting Boards:

- Have a smooth, corrosion-resistant, non-absorbent, and easily cleanable surface.
- Do not have pits, chips, scratches, deep grooves, distortion, or stains.
- Are clean to sight and touch.
- Are always sanitized before and after food preparation.

### 2) Food Preparation Equipment:

- Equipment is clean to sight and touch.
- Microwave oven seals and inside cooking space are free of debris (e.g., stains, crumbs).
- Can opener is clean and free of debris.

### 3) Cleaning Equipment & Materials:

- Hot water readily available.
- Kitchen sponges/brushes/ dishrags look fresh, clean, and visibly free of debris.
- Paper towels are available.
- Automatic dishwasher is available and functions.
- Soap and/or sanitizer are available near kitchen sink.
- Hands are dried only with paper towels or designated dishtowel that is not used for other purposes.

### 4) Overall Cleanliness:

- Garbage is covered, or if exposed, is in an area at least a few feet from food preparation areas and is NOT overflowing from the container.
- Pets are never in kitchen area and especially on food preparation surfaces (e.g., counters).
- There is NO evidence of rodents (e.g., droppings) or insects (e.g., brown spots on or near baseboards).

## PERSONAL HYGIENE

### 5) Handwashing:

- You always wash your hands with soap & water
- Before preparing food or eating.
- After handling raw meat/ poultry/fish or raw produce.
- After smoking, eating, or drinking.

### 6) Food Preparation:

- You minimize touching foods with your bare hands and avoid preparing food when you are sick (i.e., have diarrhea, fever, vomiting, open sores, or persistent cough/sneezing/runny nose).
- Raw produce is washed thoroughly. Melons are washed before being sliced.

**PERISHABLE FOODS** (e.g., dairy, eggs, meat, poultry, fish, and take-out foods)

### 7) Transporting Perishable Foods:

- Cold perishable foods are transported quickly from the grocery store and, once home, are immediately refrigerated or frozen.
- Take-out and hot foods are transported quickly from the grocery store or restaurant and, once home, are immediately eaten, refrigerated, or frozen.

### 8) Preparing Perishable Foods:

- Frozen meat, fish, and poultry are thawed in the refrigerator, microwave oven, or cold water.
- Frozen meat, fish, and poultry are totally thawed before they are cooked.
- A food thermometer is used to be sure raw ground meat, chicken, and leftovers are heated to at least 165°F.
- Only pasteurized eggs are used in recipes calling for eggs that are not cooked until the yolk is solid.
- Immediately after cooking, large containers of hot food (e.g., soup, stews) are served or placed in shallow containers and cooled in the refrigerator or freezer.

### 9) Holding Perishable Foods:

- Perishable foods, including those in picnic and packed lunches, are never left at danger zone temperatures (41°F to 135°F) more than 2 hours.
- Perishable foods are discarded if left at danger zone temperatures (41°F to 135°F) more than 2 hours.

### 10) Refrigerated Foods:

- Refrigerated foods are spaced to allow air to circulate freely.
- Eggs are stored in their original carton.
- Raw meat/fish/poultry are stored in sealed, non-leaking containers placed below produce and other ready-to-eat food.
- No refrigerated food is past its expiration date.
- Leftover foods are labeled with date of preparation (or date purchased).
- Leftover foods are eaten or discarded within 7 days.

### 11) Refrigerator:

- Has a working thermometer.
- Has a temperature between 32 to 40°F.
- Is cleaned and sanitized regularly.

### 12) Freezer:

- Has a working thermometer.
- Has a temperature less than or equal to 0°F.

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# Peas - Sweet Harbingers of Spring

Daryl Minch, M.Ed., CFCS, Family & Community Health Sciences Educator, Somerset County

Nothing says "spring" more than sweet green peas on the menu. Peas are one of the first Jersey Fresh™ vegetables available. You will find at them Farmer's Markets starting in mid-May, with peak availability from mid to late June. Peas are also easy to grow. You need to plant this cool weather crop in mid to late March for May harvest.

Peas have been around since ancient times, usually dried. Later in the 17th Century, more tender varieties emerged to be eaten fresh. Sugar peas, with edible pods, are popular in Asian and French cooking. Due to the short harvest, most of peas are canned or frozen. Frozen peas better retain their beautiful green color and may be thawed and substituted for fresh in salads or other uncooked dishes.



Fresh peas are a special treat and come in 3 varieties.



**Snow peas or Chinese snow peas** - These edible-pods are translucent, straight, and flat with only tiny pea bumps. Snow peas are best picked and eaten immediately. They do not store well - 1 to 3 days at most for peak flavor and texture. These peas need minimal preparation; just remove the stem and strings long the sides by pulling. They may be eaten raw with dips or in salad or quickly cooked by steaming, boiling or stir frying. Do not over cook or you will destroy the flavor and texture.

**Sugar snap peas** - These peas were perfected in the 1970's as another edible-pod variety. The pods are curved and plump with fully developed, yet small peas. Remove the ends and string on both sides before eating or cooking. These peas also need minimal cooking - about 2 minutes of boiling or 4 minutes of steaming. Blanch the peas before stir-frying and then reheat them in the pan.

**Green Peas or English peas** - These peas need to be shelled because of the tough pod. It is a great job for kids! If you rinse the pods first, you don't need to wash the peas inside. The kids may even enjoy eating a few raw peas while shelling. Peas need short cooking times, generally 2 to 3 minutes. Do not over cook peas or add salt during cooking since it toughens the peas. Over cooking or using too much water also reduces the Vitamin C content of the peas.

## Pleasing Flavors with Peas

The sweet, mild flavor of peas does not need much enhancement. However, lemon and fresh herbs such as mint and thyme compliment the flavor of peas. Peas make a good addition to rice or other grains, soups, salads (raw or blanched), and casseroles. Peas are often combined with carrots for a colorful side dish.

## Good for You

Peas are a legume and thus a good source of protein. They are also a good source of Vitamins A, B-1 (thiamine), B-6, C and folacin and the mineral phosphorus. Peas are a great source of Vitamin K-1 that protects our bones and helps blood to clot to prevent bleeding. Peas have lots of fiber. Peas will fill you up without adding too many calories. One cup of pea pods has 26 calories, while 1 cup of shelled peas has 117 calories.

## Minty Fresh Peas

**1 lb pea pods** - strings & tips removed; rinsed  
**2 scallions** – rinsed; sliced thin including green part  
**1 teaspoon lemon zest**  
**1 tablespoon fresh mint OR**  
**1/4 tsp dried mint**  
**1 tablespoon butter**

Steam pea pods for 2 – 3 minutes. Drain.

Sauté scallions in a non-stick pan sprayed with oil over medium high heat for 1 minute.

Combine all ingredients in bowl. Toss and serve immediately. Serves 4 - 6

## Family Mealtimes – Make it a Priority

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what is served. Children who have more family meals get more of the nutrient-rich foods that build strong bodies and smart brains: more fruits, veggies, lean meats, and low-fat milk; fewer fried foods and soft drinks.

### Family mealtimes help prevent weight problems.

**SMART EATING HABITS** help children grow up being a healthy weight, avoiding problems like being seriously overweight or developing an eating disorder. During family meals, parents can model positive, healthy habits for their children, such as eating slowly, enjoying a variety of foods, and stopping when comfortably satisfied rather than overstuffed.

If family meals are not a part of your regular routine, it might seem difficult to get started. Talk over the idea of sharing family meals with other adults who feed your child, and then talk with your child. Then take action to plan family mealtimes, which should be positive, and a time for sharing.

Family meals can include eating with anyone you love, care for, live with or who cares about you. Family meals can take place during breakfast, lunch or dinner. A family meal can be shared at your dining room table, at the park, or even in a restaurant. The place doesn't really matter; it is the sharing between family members that is important to the social, emotional and physical growth of your children. Then you will be making mealtime "family time."

## Is a Food Poisoning Outbreak Brewing in Your Kitchen?

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### STORAGE

#### 13) Dry Foods (e.g., packaged and canned foods):

- Appear to be wholesome and safe to eat.
- Are in tightly closed packages (packages are not torn or damaged; canned foods do not have deep dents or bulging lids).
- Are stored in clean, cool, dry locations and not stored under a sink or near drains/pipes.
- Are stored at least 6-inches above floor.
- Are rotated on a first-in, first-out basis (i.e., one box is used up before another is opened).

#### 14) Poisonous Substances (e.g., household cleaners, sanitizers):

- Are stored away from foods to prevent contamination of food and food preparation equipment or utensils.
- Are in their original containers; containers are intact and clearly labeled.
- When used, insect/rodent-bait stations are covered and tamper resistant.

